

**Advent Lutheran Church: Censorship – 7<sup>th</sup> Letter – December 12, 2011**

To: Advent Lutheran Church Congregational Council  
James Cassens, Mark Dentler, Tim Heine, Peggy Leonhardt, Leslie Holmes, Rodney Leonhardt Jr., Betty Louis, Terry Rodgers, Joel Vest, Shirley Taloff  
5820 Pinemont Dr, Houston, TX 77092

Cc: Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631

Fm: Charlie Dean, member of Advent Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

Re: Regarding Disciplinary Action per Advent's Constitution Chapter 15 –  
Discipline of a Member

Date: December 12, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen of our Church Council:

This is the **seventh letter in a series** addressing **Council's censorship of non-exempt material** and the controversy growing out of it. It is my intent, by posting this on the Internet, to show that there is a process by which a lone church member can hold officers accountable, and especially so when the process has been hijacked by those who control it. This controversy grows out of Council's censorship policy against the congregation.

This letter includes my response to Congregational Council's citation.

**RESPONSE TO CITATION TO APPEAR BEFORE CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL**

**Names of Complainants:**

The CITATION dated November 29, 2011 fails to explain who the Complainants are. It seems that the Complainants must be the same sixteen people whose names appear in Council's letter of January 19, 2011: James Cassens, Peggy Leonhardt, Rodney Leonhardt Jr., Terry Rodgers, Mark Dentler, Becky Schultz, Marilyn Marek, Jimmy Cassens, Tim Heine, Leslie Holmes, Betty Louis, Joel Vest, Ron Held, Diana Brown, Rhonda Boehm, and Ricky Boehme.

**Reconciliation was not properly done; allegations are not specific:**

Reconciliation has not been properly done, following Matthew 18:15-17 and Advent's constitution C15.01.

Matthew 18:15-17

(15) "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their *fault*, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. (16) But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two

or three witnesses.’ (17) If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Complainants make general allegations ONLY under Chapter 15. Complainants do not allege any specific violation under any other part of Advent’s constitution. Perhaps this means that my actions are permissible under all other parts of Advent’s constitution. However, if this is not the case, then it is almost impossible to know in advance of the December 20<sup>th</sup> date how I should prepare a defense. I should not be expected to appear on December 20<sup>th</sup> and defend accusations that have not yet been specified. **The problem may be that the 16 Complainants do not completely agree amongst themselves. I am pointing this out here because I would like to see this ridiculous controversy end.**

The Complainants set out CHARGES in nine un-numbered points. For convenience, I will number them in the same order that Complainants list them.

**1<sup>st</sup> point:**

Complainants allege unauthorized use of Advent’s name, however they fail to be specific and to explain what part of Advent’s constitution prohibits any acts that I have done. Chapter 15 does not prohibit this. If Complainants plan to add to their allegations, then it is not possible for me to research this in advance of the December 20, 2011 Congregational Council meeting. If Complainants believe I have acted in a manner that is contrary to Advent’s constitution, other than Chapter 15, it should pursue that through reconciliation before proceeding to a hearing; this has not been done. If council officers, or anyone, will show me any part of Advent’s constitution that prohibits my acts, I will seriously study it and discuss it with the Complainant. I would really appreciate being able to engage with a knowledgeable and reasonable person. However, Complainants have made this impossible. There are possibly some Complainants that I have never spoken with, and I know I have only had extremely brief encounters with some of the Complainants. So far, no Complainant has set out how my actions violate Advent’s governing document. It makes me think that reconciliation was never really wanted, and that the only thing that was really wanted and intended was bullying and intimidation. If any Complainant truly wants reconciliation, he will find that I am very amenable to it.

**2<sup>nd</sup> point:**

Complainants allege inappropriate and unauthorized use of the membership director. However Complainants fail to be specific and to explain what part of Advent’s constitution prohibits any acts that I have done. Chapter 15 does not prohibit this. Council expounds with “mass voicing.” I have not mass voiced in quite some time and my present method of “voicing” does not involve the membership list. Other people have used the list to contact others on it, and Complaints appear ONLY to have a problem with my past use; it is really not my use that Complainants want to censor, but the content of my speech. In any event, if Complainants plan to add to their allegations, it will make it almost impossible for me to research this in advance of the December 20, 2011 Congregational Council meeting. If Complainants believe I have acted in a manner that is contrary to Advent’s Constitution other than Chapter 15 generally, it should pursue that through reconciliation. If Complainants, or anyone, will show me any part of Advent’s Constitution that prohibits my acts, I will seriously study it and discuss it with Complainant. I welcome the chance to engage in such a study with any knowledgeable and reasonable member

of Advent. I am open-minded to any allegation of my misunderstanding the Constitution, if someone will be specific and point it out. However, this has not been done, or even attempted. On 11/03/2011 Pastor Beck, James Cassens, Mark Dentler, and I met for close to an hour and it was not done. I welcome an intelligent and civil discussion. However, Complainants have made this impossible.

**3<sup>rd</sup> point:**

Complaints allege unauthorized solicitation for membership and participation in a group using Advent's name, etc. Again, Complaints fail to be specific and to explain what part of Advent's constitution is at issue other than Chapter 15 generally. Chapter 15 does not prohibit my acts. I welcome a chance to engage in an intelligent and civil discussion or study of any specific problem, and certainly one that relates to me violating the Constitution. Council officers have made such reconciliation engagement impossible.

**4<sup>th</sup> point:**

Complaints allege persistent trouble making, etc. Complaints base part of this on "having not gained one known supporter over this time." Complainants appears to use the same twisted logic that was prevalent during the Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968), when it was OK to bully and intimidate Negroes as long as no Whites were complaining. Please revisit my letter dated October 18, 2011. I do not expect others to subject themselves and their family to the sort of bullying and intimidation that I have received from Council members (Complainants). In any event, it would be nice if any of the sixteen Complainants would clearly set out what part of the constitution I am violating, other than Chapter 15 generally. It is not possible to prepare a defense to specific charges when none is given. As Advent is governed by its Constitution, one would assume that one's wrongful acts must specifically violate the Constitution somehow. I would welcome an opportunity to deal with this in an intelligent and civil way through reconciliation. If anyone could meet with me privately and clearly set out what part of the Constitution I have violated, I believe I would be quite eager to study such an allegation. However, as long as Complaints are hedgy, and make noncommittal statements as to their allegations, and make no connection of any allegation to violating specific parts of the Constitution other than Chapter 15 generally, it makes it almost impossible for me to realistically study any allegation. Reconciliation has not been done.

**The process that I have witnessed makes a mockery of the 3-step reconciliation process that Pastor Beck spoke about during his sermon of September 4, 2011.** According to Pastor Beck, and C15.01, the 3-step reconciliation process is a condition precedent to "(a) private admonition by the pastor." Then private admonition by the pastor is in turn a condition precedent to "(b) admonition by the pastor in the presence of two or three witnesses," which in turn is a condition precedent to "(c) citation to appear before the Congregation Council." It has been difficult to ascertain what the real (not purported) complaint(s) is, the person(s) making the complaint(s), and how this is in any way fails to comport with Advent's governing document. Further, it would be nice to know when and where each step in the process took place, and what happened at each instance. At the meeting of 11/03/2011 James Cassens took minutes and that has not been shared with me. I do not have access to secret information, nor do I have a reasonable way to discover what surprise tactics might be used against me.

### 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, & 9<sup>th</sup> points:

Complaints continue and allege problems with Advent's property, powers of council, and respecting Council. The same problem of non-specificity applies here. It is disingenuous of Complainants to supposedly point out my *fault* (Matthew 18:15), and supposedly be concerned about Advent's *constitution*, while failing to link any specific set of facts that are the basis of *fault* to any specific part of Advent's *constitution*. If anybody will allege a set of facts, AND explain how it is in violation of a specific part of Advent's Constitution, I will be the most concerned person about it at Advent. At this point, it is almost impossible to know exactly how any allegations relate to the Constitution. I welcome a new angle of looking at this on-going controversy. Perhaps there is something that I have not thought of that I ought to consider; perhaps there is something Complainants have not thought of that they ought to consider.

As my alleged actions of persistent trouble-making are administrative in nature, and are not faith based, surely Complaints could be more specific and helpful. Complaints should give me the same opportunity that each Complaints would want, were he in my shoes and "having not gained one known supporter over this time," a lonely place indeed. For a bit of levity visit Billy Walker - *Charlie's Shoes*. < [http://youtu.be/mODu\\_DbY-eA](http://youtu.be/mODu_DbY-eA) /> Again, the 3-step reconciliation process has not been realistically attempted by Complainants. And again, the reason Claimants are so un-specific in their allegations could be that they are not in complete agreement amongst themselves.

At this point, for Complainants to assert that they have reasonably pursued reconciliation under Matthew 18:15-17 borders on extreme ignorance, and vindictive use of the Bible, and vindictive use of Advent's governing document, and perhaps sleeping during Pastor Beck's sermon. It seems to me very unlikely that my actions could be so egregious by the standards of sixteen (16) Council officers, and at the same time not be in violation of Advent's governing document other than Chapter 15 generally. It appears to me that one or more Complainants is trying to correpticiously use Chapter 14, however this has not been clearly set out.

As the sixteen (16) Complainants are officers, surely they are amenable to making a real effort to follow our reconciliation process. Please consider two parts of Chapter 15. Part C15.01 states that "**Prior to disciplinary action, reconciliation will be attempted following Matthew 18:15-17.**" Part C15.02 specifies that "**A member charged with [an] offense shall ... receive[] a written notice, specifying the exact charges that have been made against the member.**"

There is no doubt that my website is the basis for some concern. **I am making the site inaccessible, for at least six months.** I will give the Complainants the benefit of the doubt that there is some constitutional basis for a complaint. This will give the Complainants time to figure out exactly what their complaints are as they relate to Advent's governing document, and present it to me. It is possible that I will concede to their point(s). **I do not understand why Complainants have not done this sooner, unless they are not in agreement amongst themselves, as it seems like such an easy thing to do.**

### On-going theft:

Presently, the acts of Complainants, being the same people who are Council officers, have the

effect of deception with respect to the allegations, and further concealing, and evading discussions and questions that would embarrass Council officers. Council's (the 16 Complainants') refusal to release digital material and allow a church member to organize it and make it available to others is an **ongoing theft against the Congregation and me**. If Council officers have any constitutional basis for this, they are keeping it a secret. Eventually, though, perhaps some Council officers will see the light. For a bit of levity and inspiration, visit Alvin imitating Hank Williams, Sr. with *I Saw The Light*. < <http://youtu.be/1sPrS6AsL6c> /> I also suggest Council (the 16 Complainants) visit Matthew 7:3.

### **Matthew 7**

#### **Judging Others**

(1) "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. (2) For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

(3) "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (4) How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

### **The 16 Complainants (Officers) are disqualified to vote on the allegations:**

Under 20.41.04 of the ELCA CONSTITUTION, "members of the Congregation Council who participate in the preparation of the written charges or who present evidence or testimony in the hearing before the Congregation Council are disqualified from voting upon the question of the guilt of the accused member." Sixteen Complainants, Officers, participated in the preparation of the written charges, as their names on the letter of January 19, 2011 show. The CITATION TO APPEAR that was handed to me on November 29, 2011 involved the same mental impressions from the January 19, 2011 letter. Therefore, these 16 people are disqualified from voting upon the question of guilt. Further it is likely that Council will call those sixteen people (themselves) as witness to present evidence or testimony against me, and so again they are disqualified to vote. Further I will call as witnesses, the same sixteen people whether Council calls them or not, so again they are disqualified to vote. Further, I will invoke the rule on all of 16 of them, so again they are disqualified to vote. It is simply contrary to common sense that the Complainants would make up the same group of Officers who will vote on whether the allegations of the Complainants are true.

This controversy has been an on-going manipulated and surreptitious procedure. Due process has been a joke. **If the CITATION TO APPEAR amounts to a full and precise statement of the charges made against me, then this matter ought to be dismissed and I should be given an apology.** If, however, Complainants intend to expound on the basis of their allegations, then I will not have had adequate time and resources to prepare a defense against the allegations. At this point, I do not know what witnesses other than the Complainants I will want to call. Perhaps there are others that I should summon, and I do not know Advent's procedure for this and church leaders have failed let me know what it is. I inquired about the procedure generally on 11/29/2011 and nothing was offered. It appears that the panel of judges or jurors will be packed with people who clearly have a problem with partiality, prejudice, and conflict of interest. Some people would call this a **Kangaroo court**.

< <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/kangaroo-court.html> />  
< [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo\\_court](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kangaroo_court) />  
< <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Kangaroo+Court> />  
< <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/kangaroo+court> />  
< <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kangaroo%20court> />

**Part 20.41.04 of the ELCA CONSTITUTION** sets out an assortment of due process and due protection matters:

**Part 20.41.04(a)** mentions the right to be given a specific written statement of the charges. The charges against are not specific, as explained above.

**Part 20.41.04(d)** mentions the right to call witnesses. As stated above, I plan to call witnesses. I need more information about proper procedure.

**Part 20.41.04(e)** mentions the right to introduce documentary evidence. I would like to introduce such, but I have no specific charges to address. I can only guess at what connection to the Constitution there will eventually be. I suppose there will be a connection sometime. As a matter of protocol, it would be nice if we could handle pre-hearing matters in a professional way. I do not have a clue who Council's contact person might be. We ought to be able to agree in advance what the document lists will be, and who the witnesses will be, etc. It would be nice to know whether there will be issues (questions) that need to be answered, what the exact charges are, what the elements are, and what defenses there might be.

**Part 20.41.04(f)** mentions the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses. I would like to know what I can expect from each witness. I should the factual allegation that each witness can be expected to set out as well as how he intends to connect that to Advent's Constitution. This should be clearly set out in advance.

**Part 20.41.04(i)** mentions the right to be treated with fundamental procedural fairness. This involves (1) avoidance by council members of written communications to or from either accused or accuser(s) without copy to the other; and (2) avoidance by council members of other communications with either the accused or the accuser(s) outside of the presence of the other. It would be impossible for the sixteen council officers to comply with this and at the same time purport to be qualified to vote on the charges. Then **subpart (3)** mentions maintaining proper decorum during the hearing, and this cannot be done if the same 16 witnesses (being the same 16 officers) must leave the hearing room when the rule is invoked. Due process under **20.41.04(i)(5)** also requires keeping a verbatim record of the hearing, made either by a stenographer or court reporter or by audio or video recording.

### **Conclusions and Comments:**

My correspondences with Council have been (1) honest, (2) factually correct, (3) not misleading, (4) to the point, (5) not otherwise inappropriate, and (6) not specifically contrary to the constitution. As of this date, Council has made no direct assertion to the contrary, other than with Chapter 15 generally. Complainants, by their actions, indicate that they really do not, and never did, want reconciliation, but only my disappearance which they are willing to achieve by

bullying and intimidation and any other contrivance. **To proceed with a hearing under the present circumstances would be a sham.** < <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sham> /> < <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sham> />

Members of Council (the 16 Complainants) are embarrassed, and find their egos more important than being open with the Congregation. Council officers (the 16 Complainants) are acting from injured pride, hurt feelings, and for being called down (reprimanded, lampooned, and satirized) by a lowly church member. Council officers (the 16 Complainants) have suppressed speech and other communication that they find inconvenient. **Council officers (the 16 Complainants) are embarrassed and just do not know how to deal with a lowly church member who has put his finger on a problem and held it there long enough for others to notice.**

At our meeting on 11/29/2011 I asked a couple of times about procedural matters and information about how the hearing would be conducted, and I was essentially told that there was nothing that could be provided to me other than a copy of Advent's constitution. As I recall, the ELCA Constitution was mentioned. Unless a person has the right education, and information technology skills, and adequate experience, and enough time, he would not discover what I have set out herein. **When I think of how almost all other Advent church members would be taken advantage of here, I am offended.**

#### **A bit of levity**

Dealing with any controversy is always easier when levity is added. Let old George Jones add a bit of levity with **White Lightning**. < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onfce-UNmmE> />

In light of Council's failure to provide an explanation for its censorship of non-exempt material, along with other intricacies, I looked for an explanation elsewhere. I believe I found one. An editor for *The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown* had an interview with a church leader of another Lutheran church about a similar censorship problem. It might be instructive in our present controversy. The interview follows.

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## The Redneck Lutheran Lowdown

Interview with Chummy Editor and Otto Autocrat, councilmember of the Hardcore Lutheran Church.



Chummy Editor



Otto Autocrat

- Chummy: Hi, old buddy.
- Otto: Hello, Chummy.
- Chummy: Otto, do you think it be good for church members to glean spiritual and historical truths from church documents?
- Otto: Ohhh, no. Us cronies want to purify fable and fantasy and leave the congregation with the facts and beliefs that we feed 'em.
- Chummy: Well, perhaps that would be best for the common lot of average church members.
- Otto: Yes. We don't want 'em to shirk their social responsibilities. We'll give 'em the enlightenment we want 'em to have.
- Chummy: Hey, Otto. I hear you autocrats have an ontology of censorship tactics.
- Otto: Yes, we sure do. But one of my favorites is the parallel strategy.
- Chummy: Parallel strategy? How does that work?
- Otto: Well, when folks start grumbling about a subject that we don't want 'em grumblin' about, us cronies develops a subject that we like better. Our subject will include some of the same talking points as the grumbling subject, but not all of 'em. We work at hushing up the bad taking points and encouraging the good'uns.
- Chummy: What happens to the bad ones?
- Otto: The grumbling subject and the good subject will run in parallel for a while as folks participate in both of 'em. We set up barriers to the grumbly taking points, then pretty soon all you hear about is the good subject. It works like a charm.
- Chummy: Who decides what arguments are good and which ones are bad?
- Otto: We do, us autocrats take on that responsibility.



Chummy: Ummm hummm. How many bad subjects can yall accommodate at one time while running good ones in parallel?

Otto: I really don't know. But we've never reached a limit.

Chummy: Is there a good parallel subject that you autocrats like more than other?

Otto: Yes, we've got our Time, Talents, & Treasures stuff that we pass out once a year. In fact, I brought one with me. A lot of folks get real quiet when we hand these out.



Chummy: How do you figure that?

Otto: I don't know. But when you goad folks into making commitments with money, some of 'em clam up tighter than a cork in a bottle of moonshine whiskey.

Chummy: Awhhhh. That's mighty durn tight!

Otto: Yeah. But we can loosen 'em up after a while.

Chummy: I've learned so much from these interviews.

Otto: Being a good manager is not intuitive. You've got to work at it.

Chummy: I can see yall work at it real hard.

Otto: We've got to be in charge of the surroundings. Ifun somebody was to learn too much, why he might think he could control us, and that ain't gonna happen.

Chummy: Oh, my goodness. The friction would hang in the air like a bad smell. Yall can't have that at church.

Otto: Nawhh. Us cronies we tend to be much better decision-makers overall. We collect information, we weigh the pros and cons, and we call the shots.

Chummy: Otto, you've taught me so much about censorship in churches. Our time is almost up again. Thanks for the interview. But give us a song before you go.

Otto: OK, buddy. I'll give you two. Go visit Buck Owens and the Buckaroos for **Sam's Place**. < <http://youtu.be/1opMM7tifws> /> Then see Dwight At **Buck Owens's Funeral**. < <http://youtu.be/sMBabhl6mZY> />

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